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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001913

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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SUBJECT: GOZ SEEKING THAW WITH USG?

REF: (A) HARARE 1901 (B) HARARE 1900 (C) HARARE 1505

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: President Mugabe's congratulatory message to President Bush on his re-election (ref A) is the latest among several indications that the GOZ is prepared to seek some degree of rapprochement with the USG. Exchanges with senior Reserve Bank officials, a businessman well-connected with the ruling party, and a ZANU-PF MP from the Foreign Affairs Committee suggest political will within the ruling party to probe for an opening with us. The messages remain too disjointed and uncoordinated to treat them as a formal solicitation of interest, however. Moreover, we see little evidence that the leadership is willing to go as far as engaging in meaningful dialogue with the opposition, conducting free and fair elections, or otherwise establishing rule of law in an effort to earn broader legitimacy in the international arena or to create conditions for genuine re-engagement. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) At the break-up of a monetary policy briefing for diplomats earlier this month, Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono invited econoff to his office for a one-hour unscheduled exchange. Amidst an extended rehash of familiar GOZ economic policies, Gono delivered a pointed message on bilateral relations. He said that the GOZ wanted to have better relations with the USG; what would it take to get relations back on a constructive track? The following week, Deputy Reserve Bank Governor Nick Ncube invited econoff to his office to underscore the message: the leadership wanted better relations with the United States, which it distinguished from its public nemesis, the United Kingdom. He maintained that Mugabe's congratulatory message to the President was just one indication; there would be more.

¶13. (C) John Bredenkamp, a Zimbabwean businessman with close ties to many in the ruling party leadership, delivered a similar message to poloff the day after Gono's exchange with econoff, albeit in more cryptic fashion. At a meeting Bredenkamp requested, he asserted that when the party was ready to chart a new course, it would test the waters indirectly. He implied that in foreign relations, the pride of the party leadership and complications of personal rivalries constrained the GOZ's ability to initiate efforts to mend relations. He noted in this vein that he had been asked by unnamed party leaders in the past to convey messages for the party to foreign governments. He then emphasized, without attribution, that the GOZ wanted to repair relations with the USG. He would not elaborate beyond asserting that "they will bend over backwards for you."

¶14. (C) Over breakfast on November 17, ZANU-PF MP and member of the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs Victor Chitongo told poloff that Mugabe's letter to the President was a clear indication that the Government was trying to pave the way for a rapprochement, albeit tentatively. He reported that he, other "Young Turks", and old guard ZANU-PF Secretary for Information (and Princeton grad) Nathan Shamuyarira wanted to improve relations and had pressed the President to send such a letter. Despite strong opposition by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo and his own initial misgivings, the President grudgingly agreed to send it.

¶15. (SBU) U.S. policy still receives generally negative coverage in the state media, with Iraq and the Middle East featured most frequently. However, the United States is seldom coupled with the UK as the prime force for regime change in Zimbabwe, as it was up until a few months ago. And curiously, after a vicious front page campaign against Ambassador Dell before his arrival, the state media has had nary a critical word against him since. The official media has given favorable coverage of apolitical and cultural events organized by the Embassy, including prominent print and broadcast coverage of an Embassy-sponsored "Art for Hope" charitable event November 19-20. It reported Mugabe's congratulatory message to POTUS without extensive comment.

¶16. (C) Months after the Ambassador initiated requests for courtesy calls with various cabinet officials, doors are only slowly opening. Indeed, the DATT overhead Minister of Defense Sidney Sekeremayi telling the Ministry's Persec over the telephone when queried about the Ambassador's appointment

request: "Why would I want to meet the American Ambassador?" Fewer than half of the Ambassador's official appointment requests to date have met with success. (By contrast, the Egyptian Ambassador has met with half of the Cabinet.) The Ambassador's courtesy calls that have taken place, including those with President Mugabe, ZANU-PF Party Chairman Nkomo, Party Secretary for Information and elder statesman Shamuyarira, Speaker of the House Mnangagwa, and Minister for State Security Goche, have been surprisingly cordial. And the Ambassador recently had a meeting with MFA Permsec Bimha on temporary entry permits for USG-sponsored NGOs which the A/DCM described as the most normal and business-like of any he has attended in the last two years.

¶7. (C) At the working level, access remains constrained. Months of efforts to secure appointments with senior police officials in connection with our trafficking in persons agenda, for example, have been politely deflected. Similarly, most (but not all) GOZ and ruling party officials continue to snub invitations to Embassy functions and social events. It is generally difficult to tell whether our difficulties stem from express orders to avoid us, a lack of guidance, conflicting priorities, or general fecklessness. Still, in working level meetings that do occur, including with police, military, and officials from politicized ministries such as the Ministries of Youth and Justice, we are told "Zimbabwe wants better relations with the United States" -- with familiar caveats about sovereignty, no quarter on land reform, etc.

Comment

¶8. (C) The foregoing exchanges are consistent with Mugabe's own indication during the Ambassador's credentials presentation in August that he wanted to see bilateral relations improve (ref C). (Ambassador Frazer told Ambassador Dell in Pretoria earlier this month that, according to President Mbeki, Mugabe privately reiterated to Mbeki his interest in better relations with the United States.) However, it was unclear whether our interlocutors during these recent instances here were advancing a semi-coordinated GOZ campaign to improve relations with the United States or were simply pushing their own agenda. In any event, a growing impetus is evident among the ruling party's younger and more business-oriented figures for broader international re-engagement, including with international financial institutions. (An IMF team visiting earlier in November was accorded meetings with President Mugabe and other senior officials and given uncharacteristically favorable media coverage; ref B) For now, however, Mugabe and key hard-liners are unlikely to accept more than a tentative testing of the waters or foundation-laying for possible greater engagement after the March parliamentary election. Career aspirations of certain key players such as Information Minister Jonathan Moyo and the suspicions and resentments of others (including Mugabe himself) will continue to fuel anti-Western sentiments.

¶9. (C) Still, we are seeing a marked departure from GOZ rhetoric of the past few years. Until recently, the ruling party seemed quite prepared to divorce Zimbabwe from the West completely, regardless of the cost to the country. It is now betraying a growing recognition of the need for help, which, coupled with increasing intra-party tensions on the issue, may afford us opportunities or leverage to exert influence down the road on issues of primary concern (rule of law, human rights, good governance) where to date we have had none.

¶10. (C) At every opportunity, including during the Ambassador's courtesy calls to date, we have reiterated the priority attached by the USG to free and fair elections, rule of law, human rights, and good governance, and their importance to bilateral relations. In response, interlocutors have made little more than token efforts to sell electoral reforms underway as a basis for re-engagement, testifying perhaps to their lack of official authority to push re-engagement or their discomfort with accepting a connection. And notwithstanding Bredenkamp's optimistic appraisal of ZANU-PF flexibility, the party shows little inclination to open up the election environment more than superficially or to negotiate constructively with the opposition. Indeed, the unpopular party's ability to control the outcome of the scheduled March elections will likely remain a priority that trumps all others, at least until after the March elections. It remains to be seen whether the party - spurred by domestic political confidence, outside pressure, and/or economic need - will take more definitive action to renew engagement with the West after the elections.

DELL